THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG

By HENRY T. FINCK

Music Editor of the New York Evening Post, Author of "Life of Richard Wagner" and many other works

MENTOR GRAVURES

RICHARD WAGNER
By Franz von Lenbach

RICHARD WAGNER'S DREAM
By Schweninger

SIEGFRIED SLAYS THE DRAGON
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BRÜNNHILDE SLUMBERING GUARDED BY MAGIC FIRE
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THE VALKYR'S RIDE
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BRÜNNHILDE
From a Painting by S. de Ivanowski, studied from Mdme. Olive Fremstad

THE MENTOR DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC
SERIAL No. 100

IN the leading operatic centers the four music dramas constituting Richard Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung are often performed separately; but once a year—sometimes twice—they are all given within a week or two, in proper order,—"Rheingold," "Walküre" (vol-keer-a), "Siegfried" (seeg-freed), and "Götterdämmerung" (get-ter-dem-mer-ung) as a special "Nibelung cycle,"—and such a cycle is looked on by the highest class of music lovers as a great festival, and is followed with concentrated attention in all its wonderful details.

Wagner himself gave his "Ring" (as it is often called for short) the subtitle "Bühnenfestspiel (bee-nen-fest-speel), or stage-festival play. It was in the summer of 1876 that he first gave it to the world, in a specially constructed theater in Bayreuth, Bavaria; and he did this in accordance with a plan conceived by him as a necessity more than a quarter of a century before.

To understand why he regarded such a festival as a necessity we must know something about the operatic situation at the time when he composed this colossal and revolutionary work. The originators of Italian opera, who lived at Florence three centuries ago, held that the play (or

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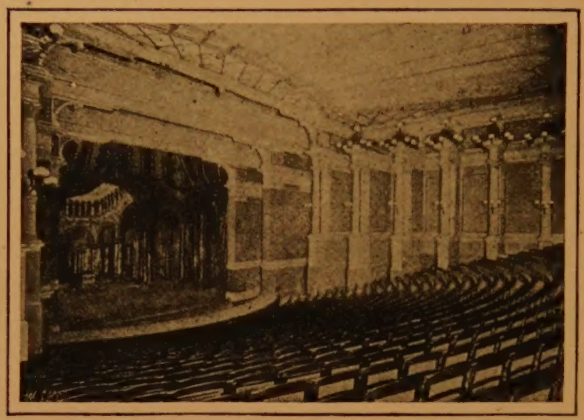


INTERIOR, BAYREUTH OPERA HOUSE

libretto) in an opera was as important as the music. In their eagerness to make it possible for the hearer to understand every word of the text they banished all flowing melody in favor of a dry recitative, halfway between speech and song, one of them actually boasting of their "noble contempt for melody."

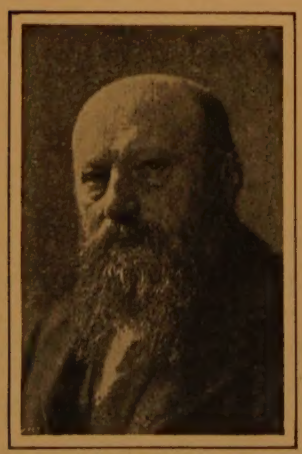
This, naturally, led to a reaction, which went so far to the side of melody that finally nobody listened except when the prima donna or the tenor sang a brilliant aria, the play being entirely ignored.

Efforts to curb the singers and restore the play to honor were made by several composers, the most important of them being Gluck (1714-1787). So thoroughly was he imbued with the importance of the play in an opera that he once wrote, "Before I begin to work I try to forget above all things that I am a musician." Yet in his operas, too, the arias remain the principal points of interest, as they do in the operas of his successors, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Mozart, Weber.

Moreover—and this is the most important point—in Gluck's operas, as Wagner himself pointed out in 1850, "aria, recitative, and ballet, each complete in itself, stand as unconnected side by side as they did before him, and still do, almost always, to the present day."

FELIX MOTTL

One of the leading conductors at the early festival performances at Bayreuth



DR. HANS RICHTER

The famous conductor, in charge of the orchestral forces at Bayreuth in 1876 and after

It was this defect of the opera—this *incoherence of its parts*—that Wagner set himself the task of remedying. The result was the Music Drama—the "Artwork of the Future," as exemplified in the Ring of the Nibelung as well as in "Tristan and Isolde," "Die Meistersinger" (mice-ter-singer), and "Parsifal."

DIFFERENT FROM ORDINARY OPERAS

These seven music dramas differ radically in their structure from what had been known for centuries as operas. Operas are made up of "set numbers"; that is, solo arias, duos, ensembles

(ahnsahmbles) for three or four voices, besides choruses, instrumental pieces, and dances. Wagner also himself wrote some operas: "The Fairies," "Rienzi," "The Flying Dutchman," "Tannhäuser" (ton-hoi-ser), and "Lohengrin," in all of which there are set numbers which are played and sung once and *do not recur*.

Beginning with the "Flying Dutchman," however, we have, besides the set numbers which do not recur, others which do recur, and these are the far-famed "motives" (German, *leitmotive*), usually called "leading motives," or guiding themes.

LUDWIG II OF BAVARIA
The young king who befriended Wagner and made his plans possible

COSIMA WAGNER
Daughter of Franz Liszt, formerly wife of Hans von Bülow, who now as Wagner's widow manages the affairs at Bayreuth

A leading motive may be defined as a characteristic melody, or succession of chords like the majestic strains of the Walhall music, the heavy clumsy musical tread of the giants, or the virile, heroic motive of Siegfried, which is sounded by the orchestra whenever in the course of the drama the personage or the dramatic idea with which it is associated comes forward or is referred to in the text.

Today Wagner's early operas seem simple to all; but the German audiences that first heard them, more than sixty years ago, found them hard nuts to crack. His "Rienzi," being in the flashy Meyerbeer style much admired at that time, won great favor, although it is the poorest of his works. His next work, "The Flying Dutchman," was so novel in style that the audiences did not know what to make of it. "Tannhäuser" was still more Wagnerian; while his "Lohengrin" seemed so far beyond the possibility of public approval that he could not get it accepted for performance, even in Dresden, where he was conductor!

RICHARD AND COSIMA WAGNER
From a photograph taken about 1872

This was only one illustration of the hard set conditions of the operatic situation. Wagner had so many reasons for dissatisfaction that he joined the revolutionary

THE RHINE DAUGHTERS, FROM RHEINGOLD. Photographed from the stage performance

uprising in 1849. This uprising was soon crushed, and Wagner, with the aid of Liszt, escaped to Switzerland, the great asylum of political fugitives. Twelve years elapsed before he was allowed to return to Germany.

For six years he did not compose another opera, devoting his time instead to writing essays in which he tried to explain the aim of his "Art-work of the Future." Nobody paid any attention to these essays. The consequence was that, as he wrote to Liszt, "I lead here entirely a dream life: if I awake, it is to suffer." He suffered because, among other things, he heard from many sources that the performances of his operas given in German cities were so bad that it was hard to understand how anyone could possibly enjoy them.

A MUSICIAN'S DREAM

If these comparatively simple operas were so badly sung and played, what would happen to the more advanced and ultra-Wagnerian work which now began to ripen in his brain,—the four music dramas constituting the "Ring"? Their performance, he realized, would be impossible in the opera houses of Berlin, Dresden, Leipsic, and other cities, as managed and manned at that time. He had to fall back on his "dream-life." And he dreamt a wonderful dream,—a dream of Bayreuth, of a specially built theater with singers and players selected by himself for their correct performance of his next work. This dream was not realized till twenty-six years later!

This next work was at first intended to be a music drama complete in itself, to be called "Siegfried's Death." On thinking the matter over,

SIEGMUND AND SIEGLINDE, FROM DIE WALKÜRE. Photographed from the stage performance

however, Wagner concluded that the poem was too full of matter for one play. Consequently he wrote a "Young Siegfried" to precede—and prepare for—"Siegfried's Death" (the name of which was changed to "Götterdämmerung," or "Dusk of the Gods"); then for the same reason he wrote "Die Walküre," to precede "Siegfried"; and finally "Rheingold," as a prelude to the other three.

While the poems were thus written in inverse order, the plot of the whole cycle had been in his mind, and written down, before he wrote any of the verses; and the music, of course, was composed in proper order, beginning in 1853 with "Rheingold."

Wagner not only wrote the poems of all his stage works, but he was a great dramatic poet. The full value of his poems, however, can be appreciated only in connection with the music, just as the music makes its deepest appeal in connection with the poem and the action. And yet his music alone is compelling enough; for Wagner concerts, at which the music is played without the words, are among the most popular of concerts.

What we should specially bear in mind is that the music in ordinary operas is simply *associated* with the dramatic poem, or libretto, whereas in the Ring the two are *identified;* or, as Wagner once expressed it, in the music drama the poem and the music are "like two pairs of lips in a kiss, each giving to and taking from the other."

To practical persons Wagner's life in Switzerland must seem deplorable. He spent six years writing theoretical essays the sales of which hardly paid for his paper and ink. Then he began to write and compose

BRÜNNHILDE'S SUMMONS TO SIEGMUND
From Die Walküre

his cycle of four Nibelung dramas, which he felt sure would never bring him in a penny, even if he succeeded (which he doubted) in ever getting them performed. But Wagner was not a practical man,—he was a genius,—he could no more help creating the Ring of the Nibelung than a volcano can help erupting when the time comes.

He finished "Rheingold"; he finished "Die Walküre"; he began "Siegfried," and got as far as the middle of it when he was compelled to stop because of lack of funds. The royalties from his operas (which since his death have netted his heirs over a million dollars) were at that time trifling. Liszt and other friends helped him; but all his efforts to help himself failed. For rehearsing and conducting the London Philharmonic concerts during the season of four *months* he got one thousand dollars, or half what in recent times Jean de Reszke used to earn in four *hours* by singing one of the Wagner roles! He finally concluded that in order to finish the Ring he must write a separate opera that might be performed at once and bring him in some money. The result was "Tristan and Isolde"; but this was as far ahead of the times as the Ring, and no opera house attempted it till six years after its completion in 1859.

KING LUDWIG TO THE RESCUE

In despair, he next composed "Die Meistersinger." This, being a comic opera and full of pleasing melody, would, he felt sure, turn the tide. It did so; but before this occurred important things happened.

Encouraged by the success of a series of concerts he had given in Russia, he spent his money recklessly in Vienna, and borrowed more, at usurious rates, because he had been invited for another tour in Russia. Through no fault of his own, this came to naught, and he had to fly from Vienna to escape a debtor's prison. First he went to Switzerland, then to Stuttgart. In a moment of despair he had bought a pistol to end his life; but better counsel prevailed, and he decided to hide in the Swabian Alps, there to complete the score of his comic opera. The wagon had already

ALBERT NIEMANN
Noted tenor who created the role of Siegmund in the original performances of Die Walküre at Bayreuth in 1876

SIEGFRIED AND FAFNER THE DRAGON. From the painting by Hermann Hendrich

been ordered, and he was packing his trunk, when a card was brought up with the name of Baron Pfistenmeister, court secretary of the king of Bavaria.

Ludwig II had but recently ascended the throne of Bavaria. He was very young, and very enthusiastic over Wagner's operas. He knew that the great composer needed help, and one of his first actions was to send his secretary to find him. He was promptly brought to Munich, where he was enabled to live in luxury at the king's expense. Not only were his operas staged at once, but also two of his music-dramas,—"Tristan and Isolde" and "Die Meistersinger."

He now returned to his "Siegfried," which, with tears in his eyes, he had abandoned in the middle of the second act. His plan was to complete this and "Götterdämmerung," and then have the whole "Ring" staged in a new theater to be specially constructed in Munich. The king cordially approved this plan; but the courtiers and the populace, jealous of the great composer because of the influence he had on the king, made such a row over it that Wagner left the city to complete his work elsewhere.

BAYREUTH AND THE FIRST FESTIVAL

The inhabitants of Munich have had reason to regret their action in opposing the plans of their king and Wagner. Since Wagner's death in 1883 a score or more of festivals have been held at Bayreuth, bringing millions of profit to that Bavarian town, all of which the Munichers

AMALIA MATERNA

Famous dramatic soprano who created the role of Brünnhilde in the original performance at Bayreuth

might have had. Bayreuth was chosen partly because it was within the realm of Wagner's royal friend, partly because of its picturesque surroundings, and partly because of its seclusion. Special inducements had been offered him to build the Nibelung Theater at the famous summer resort, Baden-Baden; but he did not wish to produce his great and revolutionary work before audiences of mere pleasure-seekers. He had spent a quarter of a century in creating an entirely new German artwork, free from all foreign elements and operatic fripperies, and he wanted to submit it to serious music lovers, who would be sufficiently interested to take a trip to remote Bayreuth.

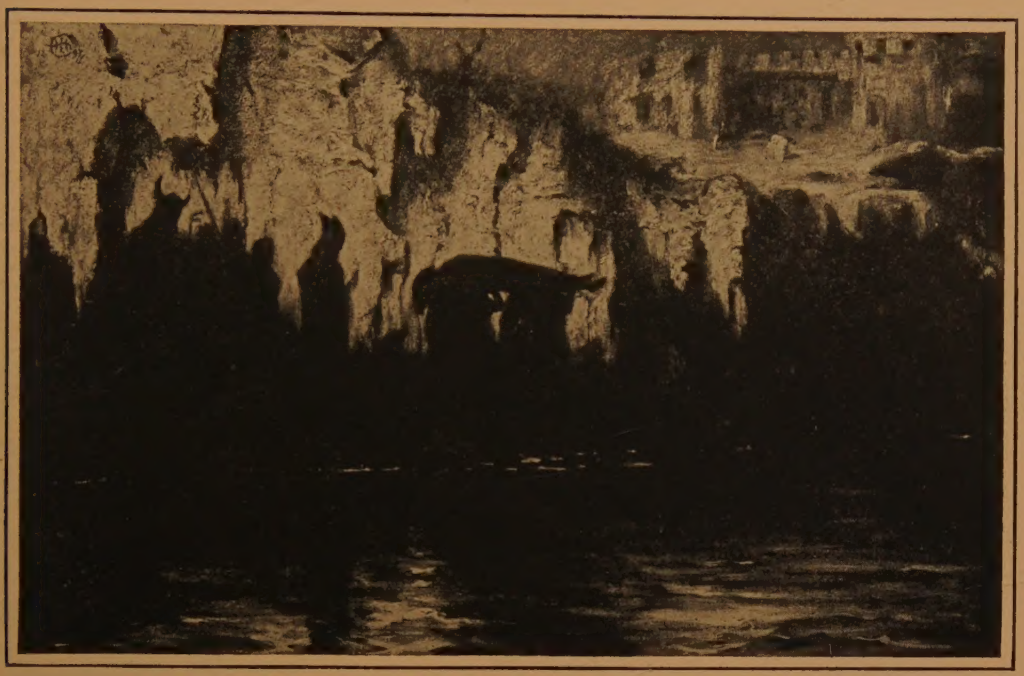
Edison, the wizard inventor, who never spared himself in work, said not long ago that genius was one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration.

Wagner's "Ring" is certainly a miracle of inspiration; yet when one reads of how much hard work he bestowed on its production after the infinite pains he had taken in creating it, one feels tempted to say that Edison did not exaggerate. Monumental proof of Wagner's indefatigable industry is afforded by two volumes, one containing his business letters, the other his letters to the artists during the preparations for the Bayreuth festivals of 1876 and 1882, over both of which he presided personally. He spent a whole summer visiting all the German opera houses and picking out the artists most suitable for each of the forty-nine solo parts in the "Ring." With most of these he corresponded personally, and also went over their parts with them before the rehearsals on the stage. The orchestra was made up with the same attention to individual merit; while the scenic features were genuine works of art.

MAX ALVARY

Popular tenor who created the role of Siegfried in America in 1887 and sang it at the 100th American performance in New York, in 1895

The Nibelung Festival of 1876 was a most important event in the history of music. Among those who attended it were two emperors (William I of Germany and Don Pedro of Brazil), King Ludwig II, the grand dukes of Weimar, Baden, and Mecklenburg, together with many



THE PASSING OF SIEGFRIED. From the painting by Hermann Hendrich

other representatives of the European aristocracy; while among those who represented the musical nobility were Liszt, Grieg, and Saint Saëns. On all these, as on the ordinary mortals assembled, the "Ring" made an indelible impression.

GUSTAV SIEHR
Who created the role of Hagen in Götterdämmerung, at Bayreuth, 1876

CONQUEST OF EUROPE AND AMERICA

That there were shortcomings it is needless to say; for everything was so new and difficult to the artists. Nor were the funds sufficient to enable Wagner to realize all his intentions. The cost of seats ($75 for the four performances—which were thrice repeated) kept many enthusiasts from attending, and the result was a deficit of $37,500.

This deficit, while it was a cruel blow to Wagner, was for the world a blessing in disguise; for it made it impossible for him to carry out his plan of reserving the future performances of the Nibelung's Ring for Bayreuth alone. There were no available funds; so King Ludwig, who had contributed $50,000 toward the expenses of the Nibelung scenery, got the privilege of producing the whole "Ring" in Munich. Other cities soon followed, and so

LILLI LEHMANN
Celebrated dramatic soprano, who took part in original Bayreuth performances and was the leading interpreter of Wagner roles in America for years

great was the success that Wagner permitted Angelo Neumann, manager of the Leipsic Opera, to organize a traveling Wagner Theater for producing the "Ring" throughout the cities of Germany, as well as in Italy and other countries. These performances were, fortunately, given under the conductorship of Anton Seidl, who had been Wagner's secretary for several years, and concerning whom Wagner wrote, "No other conductor knows as he does the proper tempi [changes of pace] of my music or how the action on the stage must be suited to the music. Seidl learned these things from me. He will conduct the Nibelungen better for you than anyone else."

AMERICAN PERFORMANCES

Fortunately, also, it was this same Anton Seidl who conducted the first performances of the "Ring" in America, beginning with "Siegfried" in 1887. "Die Walküre" had previously been produced under Leopold Damrosch. The success in these cases was immediate; for the Metropolitan Opera House had imported the leading Wagnerian singers from Germany.

The ground had been well prepared. Theodore Thomas had labored many years to educate the public up to Wagner; his activity culminating in the great Wagner festival of 1884, for which he imported three of the leading Bayreuth singers, Materna, Winkelmann, and Scaria. That same season Wagner's operas and music-dramas began to lead the others at the Metropolitan, and among the singers who helped to popularize his works were Lilli Lehmann, Marianne Brandt, Milka Ternina, Albert Niemann, Heinrich Vogl (fo-gl), Max Alvary, Theodor Reichmann, Emil Fisher, most of whom had studied with Wagner, besides, somewhat later, Jean and Edouard de Reszke, Olive Fremstad, Johanna Gadski, and the Americans Lillian

SIEGFRIED IN GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG
Photographed from Max Alvary

Nordica, Emma Eames, Louise Homer, and Geraldine Farrar.

The first of the Nibelung operas heard in New York was "Die Walküre." It was sung at the Academy of Music eight months after the festival at Bayreuth, but the performance was in every way inadequate. In a way it was fortunate for the Wagner cause that Abbey and Grau lost $250,000 giving operas in Italian and French during the first season (1883–84) of the Metropolitan Opera House, just built at a cost of $1,732,978. That failure induced the directors to try German opera, and for seven years it ruled supreme; but the German singers, great as they were in their own sphere, could not, with a few exceptions (notably Lilli Lehmann) do justice to Italian and French works. The eager desire to hear those again, under more favorable conditions, led to a temporary cessation of German opera; but it so happened that one of the famous singers engaged for French and Italian opera was the great tenor, Jean de Reszke, who gradually became an ardent Wagnerite, eager to appear in the Nibelung operas. He induced the management to reengage Seidl and some of the best German singers, and once more Wagner flourished, side by side with Verdi and Meyerbeer, Gounod and Bizet. Wagner now leads in the number of performances, followed by Puccini and Verdi. Singers of every nationality now seek to appear in the Wagner operas, and an ambition of the great conductors, including the Italian, Toscanini, is to interpret the Nibelung's Ring, of which Liszt wrote: "It overtops and commands our whole art-epoch as Mont Blanc does our mountains."

ANTON SEIDL
For years the leading conductor of Wagner opera in America

THEODORE THOMAS
Noted conductor who worked for years to make Wagner music known to the American public

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG *By G. Kobbé*

GUIDE TO THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG *By H. von Wolzogen*

RICHARD WAGNER *By Adolphe Jullien*
2 Vols. Fully illustrated

STUDIES IN THE WAGNERIAN DRAMA *By H. E. Krehbiel*

RICHARD WAGNER *By W. J. Henderson*

WAGNER AND HIS WORKS *By H. T. Finck*

A STUDY OF WAGNER *By Ernest Newman*

LIFE OF WAGNER *By Houston S. Chamberlain*
Fully illustrated

THE MUSIC DRAMAS OF R. WAGNER AND HIS FESTIVAL THEATER IN BAYREUTH *By Albert Lavignac*

THE OPEN LETTER

Dear Mrs. B—n:

I know exactly how you feel about Wagner's music. You write me that your club is to devote several afternoons to Wagner and that the preparatory study that you have to give to it is "too much like hard work." You ask, "Why must it be so? Cannot Wagner's music be appreciated without having to master a system of things as puzzling and difficult as bezique?"

* * *

A very good question. It has been asked many times. It was answered in a way some years ago when a very eminent New York music critic found a young friend at a Wagner Music Drama poring over a commentary and busily memorizing the leading motives instead of listening to the music. "Go as far with that as your enthusiasm will carry you," said the critic. "Then forget it all—and let the music tell you its own story." "But," was the answer, "I want to listen intelligently and not miss any of the meaning of the music or the text."

* * *

That, Mrs. B—n, is your attitude. You want to understand the principles of Wagner's Art. Good. But don't make hard work of it. I have been all through the experience and I know what it means. I was a young worshipper at Wagner's shrine in the years when Anton Seidl was making the Music Drama known in America, and Max Alvary, Lilli Lehmann, and Emil Fischer filled the leading roles. Night after night, libretto and commentary in hand, I sat through hours of Music Drama until I knew every measure intimately. I could tick off unerringly each individual motive as it occurred. Sometimes four or five of them would be going at once, but none of them ever escaped me. By and by I got tired of this academic exercise and then I made a wonderful discovery. I found that my labors had been unnecessary. The music was plain enough to anyone who was sensitive to music and who followed the drama attentively. I discovered this through a friend whom I took to the Ring of the Nibelung for the first time. He had not studied as I had, but when he heard the quick tapping sound of the hammers in Rhinegold he did not have to be told that it was the Nibelung motive. The heavy tread of the music of the giants was perfectly plain to him, and so was the mad galop of the Valkyrs, while the solemn measures that accompanied the gods across the rainbow bridge made clear to him the majesty of Walhall. At one time he turned to me and said, "I don't know what the text books call that musical theme, but it means 'Pleading' to me." The "Magic Fire" and "Slumber" music were eloquently expressive to him, and whenever he heard the ominous beat of the kettle-drum he exclaimed without hesitation, "That means 'Fate!'"

* * *

Of course this is easy in the case of the motives that are musically descriptive of their subjects. But it is true also of those that are merely arbitrary musical symbols, such, as the motives of the "Wälsung Family," or "The Compact." Your attention is called to these motives at the time when they are first played and instinctively you associate them with their subjects when they are repeated.

* * *

"But," you may say, "that is not the way to master the score. A commentary is surely needed." A commentary is indeed a material help. But, after all, you will have to go to the music finally, so why not *start* with the music? It is simply a question of the best method of learning. The handbook and commentary method is like the old grammar and speller—didactic and dry. Wagner music is a great deal better than Wagner explanations. So, go to the music at once and follow it closely. A great deal that makes up Wagner's Art will quickly become apparent to you. Intelligent, appreciative commentaries written by scholarly critical writers are valuable reading, *after* you have heard the music. A course of handbook study before you are familiar with the music is indeed, as you say, very much "like hard work."

Sincerely yours,

W. D. Moffat

EDITOR

RICHARD WAGNER—Portrait by Franz von Lenbach

The Ring of the Nibelung

THE MUSIC DRAMA

Monograph Number One in The Mentor Reading Course

MUSIC DRAMA, as Mr. Finck says, is quite different from Opera. In Wagner's early years opera, for the most part, was a weak, vapid thing dramatically, the plot foolish and flat, the music a string of songs, duets, quartets, and choruses connected by dull recitative. The music was showy, and of a kind to display the skill of the singer rather than the composer. And prima donnas at times in their vanity would embellish this most florid music with additional vocal flourishes.

Richard Wagner composed operas before he perfected his Music Drama, but in several of these operas—The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser, and Lohengrin—he gave plain intimations of the principles which he developed later in what he called "The Art Work of the Future." Instinctively he reached out toward his ultimate object in art before he had fully formulated his ideas; and the composers whom he admired were those who had made music a means of true, dramatic expression—Gluck, Mozart and Weber, in opera, and Schubert in song. All of them made music the expression of the *composer's* intentions as against the vanity of the singer. Mozart defeated the despotic methods of prima donnas in some cases by making his arias so difficult technically that the singers could not add any embellishments of their own. But, while insisting on the claims of the composer, none of these great musicians thought of allowing the drama to *determine* the form and style of the music. That is an essential principle in the Music Drama. The music does not simply *accompany* the drama—it is itself the very expression of the drama. The Rhine music, 135 bars, opening Rheingold, is not simply an appropriate accompaniment to the flow of the river. It *is* the river translated into musical form—so much so that if played in a concert room apart from the scene of the murky Rhine depths, in which the Rhine Maidens are circling, it would have no meaning. And while a great deal of Wagner's music lends itself readily to concert production, and is popular as such, the interest in it is a combined music and dramatic one.

The Music Drama is not a single art. It is a manifold art, combining the arts of poetry, painting, sculpture, and music. Wagner contended that the arts strayed away and fell backward after the days of the glory of Greek Drama, because each art tried to develop and perfect itself separately in its own way. Wagner asserted that the way to the true, full, perfected art work was to reunite these arts in the Music Drama. This theory he set forth in many writings, and finally expressed in his compositions. His Music Drama, therefore, gives full expression for the poet in the text of the play, for the painter in the scenic effects, for the sculptor in the statuesque groups on the stage, and for the composer in the musical expression which completes the combination.

And none of these contributors, not even the composer, dominates or controls the others—not even *accompanies* them. The elements of the Music Drama are more closely interwoven than that. The contributing arts are amalgamated in one single complete art.

And this is what Wagner called "The Art Work of the Future."

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The Ring of the Nibelung

THE FESTIVAL HOUSE AT BAYREUTH

Monograph Number Two in The Mentor Reading Course

IT was in 1870 that Wagner's dream of a theater of his own gave promise of full realization. In 1864 King Ludwig of Bavaria, at the age of nineteen, gave Wagner his patronage, and backed him financially. By this means, in the years 1865–1870 Tristan, Meistersinger, Rheingold, and Walküre were performed in Munich. The King wanted the festival house there, but the court and the populace regarded this plan with jealous resentment. Moreover, Wagner preferred a more remote place better suited to fostering a new art undertaking. So the little town of Bayreuth was chosen. Wagner obtained from the municipality a free grant of land for a festival-theater and his own house. The architect Gottfried Semper was commissioned to prepare definite plans. Everything was settled but the money, and the estimated cost was 1,125,000 francs. Wagnerian societies were formed all over Europe, and in the United States, and the interest of financial men in Germany was secured. The foundation stone of the Festival-Theater was laid with great ceremony by Wagner himself on May 22, 1872, the 59th anniversary of his birth. The work of construction proceeded rapidly, although the subscriptions were short of the total sum required. Ludwig made up the amount lacking.

Thus, after forty years of struggle, Wagner saw his colossal project realized in 1876, when the Festival-Theater was opened for the production of the Ring of the Nibelung. Three representations of the Ring took place during the summer of that year. Then for six years it was impossible to open the theater for want of money. In 1882 Parsifal was produced there, and since then festival performances have taken place there about every two years. Wagner, however, died in 1883, so he saw only two of his own great music festivals.

The theater was a model in its way—which means in Wagner's way. It was planned entirely with the thought of the performance and not at all for the display of the audience. It contains 1344 seats, arranged in a fan-shaped amphitheater. There are thirty rows of seats, and at the very back of the hall there are nine boxes, reserved for royalty and for Wagner's invited guests. Above the boxes there is a large gallery containing 200 seats. The orchestra is sunk, and invisible. Musicians descend on steps a long way under the stage into a kind of cave, which has received the name in Bayreuth of "the mystic abyss." The space reserved for the stage is even larger than the hall. The curtain divides the building almost into two equal parts. There is no foyer for the public. The audience steps out readily from any of the rows in the auditorium directly into the outer air, and can find refuge and refreshment in one of the many cafe restaurants in the vicinity. On the same floor with the royal boxes an annex was built in 1882, which affords entertainment rooms for privileged guests.

The spirit that permeates the Festival-Theater is one of unselfish devotion. The characteristic of everyone who takes part there is a complete surrender of personal interests. Each one comes to Bayreuth with a sole purpose of contributing the utmost to the festival play. Therefore, no one, singer or members of the orchestra or chorus, instructors or conductors, scene shifters or aides, receive any salary or reward. Their travel expenses are paid and they are lodged in Bayreuth at the expense of the administration—that is all. And in return they are treated not as paid artists, but as honored guests.

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The Ring of the Nibelung

DAS RHEINGOLD

Monograph Number Three in The Mentor Reading Course

IN the beginning Gold, the symbol of human desire, lay in the bed of the Rhine. It was worshipped and attended by the daughters of the Rhine. Then it was stolen from them. In the end it was restored to them, but between the beginning and the end it carried its curse through many tragic chapters.

This treasure was called the Rheingold, and, when wrought into a ring it gave its owner universal power. One condition only went with the Rheingold,—he who owned it must renounce love forever.

Three beautiful Maidens of the Rhine guarded the gold, and Alberich, the ugly King of the Nibelungs—the dwarfs who lived underground—tried to make love to them. They rejected hi n scornfully, and so the dwarf, seeing the gold in the river and knowing its power, forswore love forever, and seizing the treasure, bore it off to his underground home.

Just at this time Wotan and the other gods were building a marvellous castle. They did not have the strength to build this palace by themselves, so they had called the giants to their aid. For their pay Wotan promised them the goddess of youth, Freia. As her loss would bring old age and decay upon the gods, he never meant to keep his promise—a habit of Wotan's, by the way. He trusted to the cunning of Loge (Ló-gee), the Fire god, to get him out of the predicament.

When appealed to, however, Loge declared that after searching all heaven and earth, he could find no way out of the difficulty. But he also reported that he had heard of the stealing of the Rheingold, and suggested that perhaps the giants would take the ring of the Nibelung in place of Freia if the gods could get it away from Alberich. The giants, between whom and the Nibelungs a feud had existed for a long time, knew that if Alberich kept the ring he would have dominion over them. So they agreed that if the gods would get them the Rhine treasure they would give up their claim to Freia.

Therefore Wotan and Loge descended to Nibelheim. There they found Alberich gathering together a great hoard of treasure by the aid of the magic ring. Furthermore, Mime, one of his lieutenants, had made him a helmet by which he could change his shape or become invisible. Loge suggested that, to prove the power of the helmet, Alberich change himself into a toad. The dwarf did this, and the gods promptly seized and bound him. They then forced him to give up the helmet and the ring. Alberich had to agree, but he uttered a curse on the ring that brought death and destruction to everyone who owned it.

When the giants came for their reward, they placed their tall spears upright in the ground before Freia, and demanded a pile of gold high enough to conceal her. However, when all the gold was heaped together, and even the magic helmet added to the pile, there was still a chink through which the eye of the goddess could be seen. To fill this the giants demanded the ring. Wotan did not want to part with this, but the goddess Erda appeared and warned him against the curse, so he added it to the heap.

The curse immediately began its work. Fafner, one of the giants, claimed the greater part of the hoard of gold for himself. When Fasolt, the other giant, resented this, he slew him. This was but the first of the many tragedies that followed the ring.

A beautiful rainbow bridge now appeared, spanning the valley, and over this the gods passed, and entered their new palace of Walhall.

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WOTAN'S FAREWELL (DIE WALKÜRE)—FROM THE PAINTING BY K. DIELITZ

The Ring of the Nibelung

DIE WALKÜRE

Monograph Number Four in The Mentor Reading Course

WOTAN and the rest of the gods were in a serious dilemma. They must not get back the cursed ring, for its possession would bring ruin. And yet if they left it with the giant Fafner, Alberich might recover it and make the gods his slaves. There was only one way out of the dilemma. The ring must go to someone whom the gods need not fear. As long as no enemy had the ring, the gods were safe enough in their new citadel. This was guarded by the Valkyr Maidens, nine of them, all daughters of Wotan and Erda. Their mission was to follow mortals in combat and to carry the fallen heroes on their horses to Walhall to form its guard. Having provided for present safety, Wotan looked to the future. He went to the earth and, uniting himself with a mortal woman, under the name of Wälse, meaning "wolf," he founded the formidable race of the Wälsungs—Siegmund and Sieglinde—on whom he set his hopes.

Sieglinde, grown to maturity, was carried off and married against her will to the rough hunter, Hunding. One night to the hut where Hunding and Sieglinde were living came Siegmund, a fugitive, wearied with conflict, and battered by the storm. He had been fighting with Hunding, and had entered the very home of his enemy. Sieglinde came in and found him lying exhausted by the hearth. She gave him a refreshing draught. Then came Hunding, to whom Siegmund told his story, thereby revealing himself as his host's foe. Hunding would not fight him in his own home, but challenged him to combat the next day.

That night Siegmund and Sieglinde discovered their identity, and decided to fly together. At the wedding feast of Hunding and Sieglinde a mysterious stranger, who was none other than the god Wotan himself, had thrust up to its hilt in the trunk of the tree which supported their dwelling, a sword which he said could only be withdrawn by the bravest of men. Siegmund proved his right to the sword by drawing it forth with ease. Then the two Wälsungs fled out into the night.

Wotan knew of the inevitable conflict between Hunding and Siegmund, and he summoned Brünnhilde, the Valkyr, and ordered her to give Siegmund aid. But Fricka, the wife of Wotan, the ever jealous guardian of the proprieties, demanded that Siegmund be killed. Against his will, Wotan yielded and commanded Brünnhilde to see that Siegmund lost the combat. Wotan also told Brünnhilde of the ring, and of the fatal spell. The giant Fafner, in the form of a dragon, guarded this ring. It could only be won by a hero unaided by the gods. Wotan thought that he had such a hero in Siegmund, but Siegmund was not a free agent, since Wotan had been the moving spirit in all his actions.

Brünnhilde then appeared to Siegmund and told him of his fate, but her heart melted at the despair of the lovers, and when the fight began she protected the hero. Wotan thereupon appeared and interposed his spear, causing Siegmund to be killed. The sword, "Nothung," was shivered into many pieces. Brünnhilde fled with Sieglinde.

For her disobedience Wotan revoked the divinity of Brünnhilde. He condemned her to wed the mortal who should rouse her from the slumber into which he was about to cast her. The Valkyr besought him that none but the bravest hero on earth should awaken her. Wotan granted her wish, and promised that she should be guarded by magic fire. Wotan then kissed Brünnhilde, and cast her into slumber. He struck his staff on the rocks, and summoned Loge, the Fire God. In answer, flames sprang up and surrounded the sleeping Valkyr maiden.

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SIEGFRIED SLAYS THE DRAGON (SIEGFRIED)--FROM THE PAINTING BY K. DIELITZ

The Ring of the Nibelung

SIEGFRIED

Monograph Number Five in The Mentor Reading Course

IN the depths of a mighty forest stood a hut, and there dwelt a brave, strong, handsome youth in company with a mean little dwarf. Every day the dwarf was busy forging a sword.

The dwarf was Mime, brother of Alberich, the king of the Nibelungs; and the youth was Siegfried, the son of Siegmund and Sieglinde. After Brünnhilde had been cast into slumber by Wotan, Mime took upon himself the care of Sieglinde. When she died, he brought her son up to manhood. This was not kind heartedness on the part of Mime, but crafty wisdom. He knew that Siegfried was destined to be a mighty hero, and he hoped that the youth might slay Fafner, the dragon, and recover the ring for the Nibelungs.

Sieglinde had entrusted to Mime the pieces of the sword Nothung, and although the dwarf knew that no other weapon would serve for the slaying of Fafner, he also realized that he was unequal to the task of forging the pieces together again. Therefore he kept trying to make other swords for Siegfried to use, but the youth broke them all.

One day Siegfried, angry at Mime's continued failure to make him a suitable sword, rushed out of the cabin in anger. Then a stranger, who was none other than Wotan himself, in the guise of a Wanderer, appeared to Mime, and in a contest of riddles, forced from Mime the confession of his failure, and then revealed to him that Nothung could only be forged anew by one to whom fear was unknown. When Siegfried returned, Mime admitted his inability to forge the sword, and told the youth to try it himself. As Siegfried knew no fear, he was successful. Then Mime told Siegfried that he would lead him to the dragon Fafner.

Siegfried, led by Mime, came to the dragon's cave, and, in a wood-scene of great beauty, sat listening to the song of birds, and replied to them joyously with his horn. Fafner, the dragon, was finally roused by Siegfried's horn, and came out of his cave breathing threats and fiery blasts. After a mighty battle, Siegfried slew him.

Siegfried's hand was scorched by the fiery blood of the dragon, and he placed it to his lips to cool it. On tasting the blood, he was able to understand the song of a bird that told him to take possession of both the ring and the helmet, and to be on guard against Mime. Consequently, when the dwarf attempted to give him a poisoned drink, Siegfried killed him.

Then the bird told Siegfried of Brünnhilde, who could only be wakened from her slumber by one who knew no fear, and who could penetrate the ring of magic fire. Siegfried said that he had never known what fear was, and he followed the bird to where the Valkyr maiden slumbered.

In the meantime, in his perplexity, Wotan summoned Erda and sought counsel with her. Could she tell him how to stop the rolling wheel of destruction? But Erda's wisdom could avail him nothing now, and Wotan resigned himself to the downfall of the gods. Then he confronted Siegfried on his way to Brünnhilde and barred his way with a spear to test his courage and strength. Without hesitation, Siegfried cut the spear in two with his sword, and made his way through the flames to the summit of the mountain, where he found Brünnhilde sleeping on a rock under a fir tree. Siegfried gazed at the slumbering maiden in amazement Then, removing Brünnhilde's helmet, he woke her with a kiss. At first she shrank in terror from her fate. Then, recognizing Siegfried as the son of Siegmund and as the bravest hero in the world, whose coming she had herself foretold, she confessed her love for him, and yielded in ecstasy to his embrace.

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The Ring of the Nibelung

DIE GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

Monograph Number Six in The Mentor Reading Course

WHILE Siegfried and Brünnhilde were happy together, Siegfried must needs go forth to seek further adventures. He gave Brünnhilde the ring as a pledge of fidelity, and she presented him with her shield and her horse, Grane.

Siegfried journeyed along the Rhine to the palace of the Gibichungs, Gunther and his sister, Gutrune. Hagen, their half brother, the son of Alberich, lived there with them. Alberich had imposed upon Hagen the task of regaining the ring. Therefore, on seeing Siegfried, he began to plot. Gutrune, at his suggestion, gave the hero a magic drink, which made him love her, and forget Brünnhilde. So, when Gunther expressed his desire for a wife, Siegfried promised him the Valkyr Brunnhilde, claiming as a reward, the hand of Gutrune.

In the meantime, Brünnhilde, awaiting the return of Siegfried, was visited by another Valkyr, Waltraute, who begged her to give up the fatal ring to the Rhine maidens, and so save the Gods from destruction. But this Brünnhilde refused to do, counting Siegfried's love a greater treasure than her lost divinity.

Siegfried then appeared to her in the form of Gunther, which he had assumed by means of the magic helmet. He forced the ring from her, and commanded her to accept Gunther as her husband. Brünnhilde was taken by her new husband to the palace of the Gibichungs. When she arrived there, and saw Siegfried with Gutrune, she at once accused him of having betrayed both herself and Gunther. The crafty Hagen then promised Brünnhilde and Gunther to avenge them on Siegfried.

A hunting party was arranged, and during it Siegfried, who had become separated from the others, was met by the three Rhine Maidens, who entreated him to give back the Ring. He refused, even when they told him that his refusal would mean that he should die that day.

Then the others of the party came up, and during the meal Hagen gave Siegfried a magic potion, under the influence of which memory returned to him, and he told the story of Mime, the dragon, and the forest bird. As he was in the midst of his tale, two ravens flew out of the thicket behind him, and he turned to look at them. Hagen immediately speared him in the back, the only vulnerable spot in his body. Brünnhilde had made the hero invulnerable with this exception, for she knew that in battle he would never turn his back to the enemy. Siegfried fell dying, his last words a passionate greeting to Brünnhilde, whom now he recalled with rapture as his beloved wife. His body was placed on his shield, and slowly the funeral procession marched back to the castle.

At the hall Hagen claimed the Ring, and when Gunther opposed him, Hagen killed him. But when he attempted to snatch the Ring from Siegfried's finger, the hand of the dead hero rose in awful warning.

Brünnhilde then appeared, knowing the truth at last, and proclaimed Siegfried the victim of tragic fate.

A funeral pyre was raised, on which the body of Siegfried was laid. Brünnhilde tenderly drew the Ring from his finger, and cast it to the Rhine. She threw a torch under the funeral pyre and, as the flames rose, she grasped her faithful steed, Grane, by the mane, and charged with him into the flames. The waters of the Rhine then rose and flooded the castle of Gunther. Hagen was dragged beneath the waters. All was submerged, and above the general catastrophe, Walhall was consumed. The twilight of the gods had come. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new."

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